DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 205 977 CS 206 513

AUTHOR Rutz, Linda Robinson
TITLE Advertising and Women's Changing Work Roles.
PUB DATE Aug 81
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (64th, East Lansing, MI, August 8-11, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; *Communication Research; *Employed Women; *Females; Marketing; *Role Perception; Sex Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine how well the advertising industry portrays the changing work roles of women. Four advertising executives were interviewed to find out their feelings about the changes in women's work roles and what action they were taking to adapt advertising to these changes, while 11 women were interviewed with similar questions. The results of these two studies were used to construct a questionnaire that was given to 39 working and nonworking women. The results of the questionnaire indicated that while advertisers are content to address the women's advertising market in two groupings, working and nonworking, the breakdown is more complex. The women in the study saw themselves as being not necessarily in one role or the other, but in a combination of roles. The women who had worked but were temporarily home with families still considered themselves working women. The subjects felt that advertising did not portray women in roles similar to their own: nonworking women thought advertising portrayed women as working, while working women felt advertising portrayed women as nonworking. Regardless of how women were portrayed, the women in the study were generally dissatisfied with advertising. The results suggest that advertisers' perceptions of what is normative for women are based on demographic assumptions, when they should be addressing women's changing perceptions of themselves and how these perceptions affect their behavior in the marketplace. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED205977

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ADVERTISING AND WOMEN'S CHANGING WORK ROLES

By

Linda Robinson Rutz, M.A.
University of Nebraska
Lincoln, Nebraska

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linda Robinson Rutz

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented to the Advertising Division, Association for Education in Journalism, annual convention, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, August 1981.

ADVERTISING AND WOMEN'S CHANGING WORK ROLES

Eli Ginzburg has suggested that "the rise of the number of working women is the most outstanding phenomenon of our century."[1] Other social scientists have commented that social changes, for example the increase of working women, may be more complex than meets the eye.[2] And, while their reasons for working may vary, there is not any doubt that working women have helped this country's economy. It is big business to help working women spend their wages.

It is important to note that women have always been the focal point in the marketplace. Traditionally, they are the ones who have run the household. Traditionally, they are the ones to whom advertisers have chosen to sell their products. And traditionally, advertisers have defined and approached them as one market--women.

But, in times of significant change, as we are now experiencing, how are advertisers dealing with women? How are advertisers responding to the social changes that are affecting the lives and lifestyles of these women? How can advertisers predict, plan for and be on the upside of fashions and changes in the marketplace that are a result of these interrelated social changes? The question at hand is, how can the advertising industry predict and deal with social changes in the marketplace, specifically, women's changing work roles?

This exploratory study examined this specific question with the goal of providing a framework usable for more in-depth research on the problem. Three questions formed the basis for this study:

1. How women's changing work roles--defined as jobs, careers and staying at home--are perceived by those making decisions about advertising.

2. How women see themselves in regard to their work roles--jobs, careers and staying at home.

3. How women view the portrayal of women in advertising as it pertains to changing work roles--jobs, careers, staying at home.

While women's changing work roles were the focus of this study, it is necessary to consider this phenomenon as a part of the women's movement along with other dynamic, interacting societal change. This study did not attempt to analyze such interaction. Rather, it asked the reader to recognize the complexity of this interaction as a backdrop for the exploratory study of women's changing work roles as perceived by advertisers and women.

Background

Mass media and their economic base--advertising--are most often considered to be reflective of society; agents of reinforcement rather than agents of change.[3] Recent research supports the media as largely normative in content rather than leading toward change. And, since the 1940's, emphasis in mass media research has shifted from study of the communicator and power of the media to how audiences use media for themselves and the interacting factors that influence such use.[4]

Such study, however, often has presupposed that norms are apparent. Advertisers, for example, employ the strategy of using background that

is a reflection of normative matters for the particular audience the advertiser has targeted.[5] However, when audiences are active, assessing what is normative in periods of rapid change may present difficulty to the communicator, here the advertiser; especially when the advertiser is not a member of the target group, for example, women experiencing rapid societal change.[6]

When do societal changes, such as career and family, become non-controversial so that it is safe for the advertiser to incorporate them as enhancing background for selling ideas, products and services? While advertisers do underwrite extensive research, such research usually concentrates on their products' acceptance rather than on broad-based questions such as when is something normative. Yet, it is assumed that if advertising is to succeed the agency or advertiser should implement advertising which incorporates the use of material that is normative.

Members of the audience have a stake in the communication act, for example, in an advertising message. William Stephenson has suggested that communication plays a major role in providing opportunity for self-enhancement. Stephenson calls this "communication pleasure."[7]

Communication pleasure takes place when individuals use the media. Stephenson concluded that individuals seek reinforcement for their own feelings, views and situations. Women's changing work roles provide an illustration. Like others, a woman looks to the mass media for enhancement of the self she perceives, confirmation for who she is and reinforcement for her roles--for example, professional, wife, mother

and student. But, what happens to communication pleasure when the women does not find the self-enhancement she is seeking? What happens when the normative background advertisers are employing is not the norm for the audience, here women?

At the same time Stephenson places emphasis on the audience's role in communication, Melvin DeFleur calls for further study of the influence of the content of media. He suggested that ideas of reality are gained from the media. And he proposed that defining and confirming what is real is broadened and influenced by the media. He further suggested that mass media assist in establishing what is real, extending meanings of reality, substituting new meanings for reality, stabilizing or reinforcing the status quo--meanings that have come from earlier times.[8]

DeFleur cited findings from his study of "Television's Portrayal of the Mentally Ill." He pointed out that while the medical profession has provided and substituted new meanings for mental illness, the public has not kept pace with those changes.[9] The public's perception of what mentally ill means is based on meanings from decades ago, before the extensive research and updated information provided by the medical profession. There is substantial information, in addition to statistics and demographics, that documents the reality of mental illness has changed. However, the public's perception of what mental illness is continues to be reinforced by out-dated meanings via several public sources--for example, television.[10]

Women's changing work roles provide another example. The reality of women's changing work roles may be very different for advertisers than that for women. With this perspective, it becomes necessary to examine how communicators, in this case advertisers, have dealt directly with the reality of women. Immediately one finds the sources are limited. Those that do exist most often do not have a research or theoretical basis.

Government statistics about women are readily available. They are designed for use by all constituencies of government; business, of course, is a primary user. Advertisers have these data available to assist in all phases of decision making. Additional demographic materials are found in academic studies and trade journals.

The notion that advertisers are addressing two market groups of women is based on statistics that show two groups of women--those working outside the home and those working in the home. These two groups have commonly been labeled working and non-working, respectively. Adverstisers often employ these same statistics in determining copy strategy and media choices. Other trade journal and governmental sources address issues such as women's changing media usage, women's work roles and media's segmentation of the women's market.

The National Advertising Review Board, which addresses the issue of social responsibility in advertising, completed a report in 1975 dealing with "Advertising Portraying or Directed to Women." The report did not present specific rules for dealing with advertising appealing to or directed to women because in its words, "the scene

is changing too fast."[11] Advertising has and will continue to be affected by social changes such as the women's movement and it is the industry's responsibility to deal with it.[12]

In two recent studies, psychographics were used to study work roles of women. In March 1979, the research department of Levine, Huntley, Schmidt, Plapler and Beaver in New York City reported a study suggesting that the "working woman" phenomenon is more complex than first realized. And while the number of women working outside the home is growing, the study stated that assumptions about the women's market will experience change. Advertisers will have to guard against substituting a new set of stereotypes for the old. Working women cannot be totally separated from the homemaker market, nor can the same assumptions be attributed to all working women, according to Levine, Huntley, Schmidt, Plapler and Beaver.[13] The report concluded that advertisers should not assume the working woman group is a unified market segment, and suggested that it consists of several sub-groups. Levine, Huntley, Schmidt, Plapler and Beaver reported that Yankelovich and TGI have developed definitions reflecting women's mind sets toward work and home. The definitions should help advertisers differentiate the audience.[14]

The findings of an eight-year study by Rena Bartos at J. Walter Thompson addressed how social changes and trends are affecting marketing products and ideas.[15] She emphasized that current social change is not being reflected in today's advertising. Advertisers have continued to portray women in traditional roles. And while more and more

advertisers are beginning to take note of today's diverse women's market, her findings urge caution in advertising to that market.[16]

Both studies emphasized the need for proper evaluation of the market potential of each group and the role this kind of qualitative information can play in addressing this specific market group.[17]

Methodology

This study of women's changing work roles and how these roles are reflected in advertising directed to women was exploratory.

In-depth interviews were held with four advertising executives representing different advertising organizations in a medium-sized Midwest market. The purpose of these interviews was threefold: (1) to find out if these executives were aware of the changing work roles of women and the level of their awareness; (2) to find out their concerns and feelings about how these changes are reflected in their advertising directed to women; and (3) to find out if these executives were doing anything to address the situation and what specific action they were taking.

Questions similar to those given to the advertising executives were also used in in-depth interviews with eleven women. Questionnaires were used to compare how the two groups (advertising executives and women) differentiated between job, career and staying at home. The questionnaires provided insight as to how the members of each group were dealing with these roles, if they were indeed addressing them.

Women selected described themselves as filling one or more work roles. Three had jobs, six had careers and five were staying at home. (Three of the women at home also had part-time jobs.) They ranged in age from 28 to 50. Nine were married and two were single. Eight had children.

Findings from the initial interviews, the advertisers' interviews and the in-depth interviews were used to construct the questionnaire given to a larger sample of women. Thirty-nine women residing in the same neighborhood in a Midwestern city were selected to complete the questionnaires. The questionnaires were personally delivered during two consecutive weekday evenings and were picked up three days later.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the interviews and the questionnaires indicated that women were prepared to discuss their work roles, and what effect they felt these roles had on their perceptions of advertising directed to them.

The advertisers, also prepared to discuss women's work roles, related their discussions to available demographic data. The advertisers' main concern was that their role was to sell their clients' products and services--not to report or cause social change. They also addressed the problem of how to know when such social change is safe to incorporate into their advertising.

This exploratory study suggests that changing work roles of women are having an effect on how women are perceiving advertising

directed to them. Furthermore, advertisers interviewed generally have not responded to changing work roles nor do these advertisers perceive any benefit for their business in doing so.

While advertisers are content to address the women's market by two groupings, working and non-working, the breakdown may need to be more complex. The women in this study, while they may have used the labels working and non-working for other women, did not necessarily see themselves as one or the other. Rather, they saw their lives as combinations of work roles, with movement in and out of different roles, and usually with a combination of two or three.

This movement and combination are planned. They are intended. The role "intent" plays in a woman's life, especially women with careers, was an important finding. Women in this study indicated that the changes in roles or different combinations of roles were planned. For example, career women who had worked for four or five years had decided to take time off to start their families. That time off may last two months or five years. Their intentions were to return to their careers regardless of the length of time off. Other examples cited women at home with children who went to work outside the home part-time while still at home, or went to work full-time once their children were in school or left home.

The working women in this study, who were at home with children, or for whatever reason, did not feel they should be classified as non-working. They were temporarily interrupting their careers. They felt that where

they were, at home or at the office, did not determine whether they were working or non-working, whether they were career-oriented or not. Rather, they felt that their individual intentions were the determining factor as to how they should be labeled.

Whether or not a woman is working outside the home for pay may not be the most effective factor for market segmentation. This finding also may suggest that attempting to define the women's market in terms of working only oversimplifies changes that are affecting society socially and economically.

The finding that presents work-nonwork classifications as not appropriate designations for segmentation has significance for the creators of advertising. Elements in an ad most often are used to provide a background for the product being advertised. Most often they are designed to be normative, rather than to in any way distract from the product. Dress lengths for presenters, for example, are usually normative. Background art is not to be "outstanding." Women, then, should be seen in roles similar to those of the women most likely to buy the product.

In this study, women reported seeing most advertising not reflecting women who have roles similar to their own. These women said that the background they were seeing in advertising was not normative from their viewpoint. It was not real. It was not the reality they knew. In interviews they seldom got around to talking about the merits of the product being advertised.

Women who were at home reported that they saw most women portrayed in advertising as working women. Conversely, women who worked outside the home saw most women portrayed in advertising as staying at home. Thus, women in this study did not indicate finding self-enhancement in advertising. They were not seeing the self-reinforcement advertising theorists indicate successful communication should deliver.

It is especially difficult for advertisers to provide this self-enhancement and reinforcement during periods of rapid societal change. Even as many women change their views and perceptions about themselves, some segments of society are changing at an even more rapid rate while other groups advocate traditional views.

These women also recognized advertising strategy that tried to sell different products to them in the daytime and evening. The women at home during the day were the advertisers' primary prospects for cleaners, polishes and waxes, while convenience foods, microwaves and Enjoli were targeted to the working women during evening prime time. The women at home felt the advertisers were unaware of their lifestyles, of what they did during the day. They were busy too. They also could use the convenience foods, microwaves and Enjoli.

Working women expressed a similar discontent. Managing a household in addition to their work outside of the home was a fact of life. The women wanted advertisers to learn who they (women) were and give them (women) the straight facts about the product's benefits.

Media plans based on where the woman is physically, at home or at work, may not be reliable. While this study did not specifically address media choices and usage, comments from these women indicated that their work roles were affecting media usage. Primarily, their time was limited, they said. And what time they did have, they suggested, should not be spent watching advertising that did not portray them realistically.

Conclusions

In summary, the major findings of this exploratory study were:

1. Some women who were staying at home reported that they should not be classified as at home. They said they were really career women, interrupting their careers temporarily, or had been trained and would have a career at a later time.

2. Women who were presently at home reported they were seeing most women in advertising portrayed as working women.

3. Women who presently worked outside of the home reported that they were seeing most women in advertising portrayed as staying at home.

4. Thus, most women were reporting that advertising did not portray women as they saw themselves.

5. Regardless of how women were portrayed in advertising, working or staying at home, women in this study reported much dissatisfaction with what they saw.

A critical question many advertisers should be asking is, of course, when is it safe to include or incorporate change in their

advertising? What demographics are predictive? Risk-taking is not necessarily a positive attribute of the agency/agency-client relationship. Agencies are charged with providing research on which to base change in advertising strategies.

Findings from this study suggest that the advertisers' perceptions of what is normative are based on demographic assumptions concerning work roles; thus, the 50:50 ratio. But, these findings would also propose that demographics are not adequate.

The study suggests that advertisers could profitably address the following questions:

1. How are women's changing perceptions of themselves affecting their behavior in the marketplace?

    a. More specifically, how are these changes affecting the advertiser's bottom line?

2. Are the present classifications of working and non-working useful?

3. Is segmentation indicating differences between job roles and career roles useful?

    a. What is the significance of the use of "intent" in these women's definitions of career and their self-identification?
    b. How are advertisers preparing to deal with the latent group of career women who have been out of the office physically for a period of time for one reason or another?
    c. How are advertisers addressing the movement of career women?

4. When an audience is made up of people working part-time, full-time and non-traditional schedules (flex-time), how are effective media strategies developed?

5. What steps can advertisers take to better predict what is normative?

FOOTNOTES

[1]Perceival Goodman, The Double E (New York: Anchor Press/ Doubleday, 1977), p. 70.

[2]Alfred L. Malabre, Jr., "Women at Work: As Their Ranks Swell, Women Holding Jobs Reshape U.S. Society," Wall Street Journal, Midwest ed., August 28, 1978, p. 1. col. 1.

[3]Joseph Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication (Toronto: The Free Press, 1960), p. 15; see also, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, eds. William Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Rev. ed.; Urbana-Chicago-Lincoln: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 554.

[4]Wilbur Schramm, The Process and Effects of Mass Communication (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1954), pp. 1-12; see also, Raymond A. Bauer, "The Obstinate Audience," Mass Media and Society, ed Alan Wells (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 186-196.

[5]Donald F. Roberts, "Nature of Communication Effects," The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, eds. William Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Rev. ed.; Urbana-Chicago-London: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

[6]Change is defined here as change within the structure of society. This kind of change does not alter the structure of society. Rather it is a "readjustment of the equilibrium of a social structure" (A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, A Natural Science of Society (Chicago: The Free Press, 1957), pp. 86-87.

[7]William Stephenson, The Play Theory of Mass Communications (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 57-59.

[8]Melvin DeFleur, "Mass Communication's Role in the Social Construction of Reality: Television's Cold War Against the Mentally Ill" (Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ), Houston, Texas, August, 1979), pp. 8-18.

[9]Ibid., p. 21.

[10]Ibid., p. 23.

[11]"Advertising Portraying or Directed to Women," Advertising Age, April 21, 1975, p. 76. (Review of a Special Report prepared by a consultative panel of the National Advertising Review Board.)

[12]Ibid., pp. 72-76.

[13]Levine, Huntley, Schmidt, Plapler and Beaver, Inc., "Be Cautious When Evaluating the Working Woman Market" (report by Media Department, March, 1979), p. 7.

[14]Ibid., p. 5.

[15]Marilyn Hoffman, "Woman Consumers Are Gaining New Clout," The Christian Science Monitor, January 16, 1980, p. 15.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Levine, Huntley, Schmidt, Plapler and Beaver, Inc., op. cit., pp. 1-7; see also Hoffman, op. cit., p. 15.